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ABSTRACT

Educational policymakers in many countries have been and continue to be faced with the difficulty of reconciling the principle of equal educational opportunity for all students with the provision of differential programming for gifted students, which is often perceived as elitist. This dilemma mirrors the sociopolitical conflict between emphasis on production versus emphasis on the equitable distribution of society's resources. Historically, educational provisions for gifted students in countries such as the Peoples Republic of China, the Soviet Union, Great Britain, Australia, and the United States, as well as the Western European countries, have vacillated between pullout programming designed to nurture superior competence, and periodic bursts of equity during which heterogeneous grouping was preferred. A synthesis of these two views may begin with an understanding of the sociopolitical base for educational decision making regarding gifted students, and subsequent analysis of those decisions to see to what degree they meet the current needs of society. (JW)

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EXCELLENCE AND EQUITY - A WORLD-WIDE CONFLICT

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It has been noted by many persons that the structure of a society's education program is the mirror of that society. Education is each society's own commitment to the future as well as its portrait of the present. It represents the strengths, weaknesses, and values of that society. If an educational system educates only a tiny minority or only the elite of a society, it reveals one set of values. If on the other hand, it tries to educate all its citizens and denies the fact of individual differences in a drive toward total equality--equality of treatment rather than equality for the student's individual needs--then a different political and social philosophy is revealed.

Gifted children pose a special problem to educational policymakers, because they are demonstrably different from their age mates, but different in a way that may or may not call for special attention. Children with special handicapping conditions receive differential care and attention in most countries of the world. These services are provided in support of the general value of vertical equity. This policy states that there should be "unequal treatment" of unequals in order to make them more equal. Such a value allows the expenditure of the society's resources for special education for handicapped children (Haskins, 1980).

A totally different value has to be invoked for special educational programs for gifted students. That value in most instances rests upon the importance of production for the society,

the generation of new ideas, new things, improved services, etc. By helping the gifted child find individual fulfillment, we also provide more for the society as a whole.

In essence, the classic clash of political philosophy regarding whether greater emphasis should be placed on production, or upon the equitable distribution of the society's resources, must be resolved on the educational as well as the political scene. For those persons and groups who lean to the conservative mode, production seems to be the more important. Therefore, helping gifted children become more productive fits well into that philosophy. Those leaning more toward the liberal side of the political spectrum often focus their attention on equity and are, hence, traditionally less concerned about production and less inclined to respond to arguments related to how important it is for gifted children to reach their full potential (thus making people less equal!).

The most politically sensitive act relating to gifted children is the attempt to separate them from the other students for special or additional instruction. Three major reasons are usually given for such grouping (Gallagher, 1983):

1. To allow bright youngsters to rub their intellects up against one another and in this way spark more ideas and thinking.

2. To reduce the tremendous range of abilities and achievements that one would find in an unselected group of children in the classroom, which might seriously inhibit the teacher's ability to provide a stimulating program for the gifted students.
3. To place a well-trained and capable teacher with sophisticated knowledge and skills with these youngsters.

Such proposals often seem afoul of other values of fairness and equity, and some compromise needs to be adopted. Recently, in the United States, a National Planning Effort was undertaken to collect survey information from 1200 teachers, administrators, and parents interested in gifted education. They were presented eight different choices of the most desirable program adaptation ranging from the gifted child remaining in the regular classroom with some enrichment, to the establishment of special schools for gifted students (Gallagher, Weiss, Oglesby, & Thomas, 1983). Their overwhelming choice for desired strategy at elementary school level by teachers, parents, and administrators was the resource room pullout program, which was chosen more than twice as often as any other strategy (see Figure 1).

Insert Figure 1 about here

Since there is little evidence of differential effectiveness available to support one of these strategies over another, the choice was obviously being made on the basis of social values. The basic value in support of the resource room, which usually takes the student from his regular classroom for an hour a day of special instruction, was to try to have the gifted student continue in an educational environment where they would have experience and interaction with youngsters of all levels of ability in the society, while at the same time receiving some type of special instruction. One fear of the American educators and parents who were surveyed that was expressed over and over again is that special programming for gifted students might result in the development of an intellectual elite or a leadership caste, and this was seen as an undesirable outcome.

Wu (1983) reported the feelings of parents in Taiwan on programs of special classes for gifted students compared with a resource room program. Unlike the parents in the United States who preferred the resource program, the parents of gifted students in Taiwan preferred the special class which apparently carried special meaning in that society. Gifted students in the special classes in Taiwan apparently have an additional advantage in getting into

higher education, and thus, carried a very special advantage in that society. Clearly similar educational provisions in different cultures can bring forth very different reactions because of what else they symbolize.

How do other countries attempt to cope with this problem? Each society must deliberately, or by default, deal with the issue. Butler (1983) reviewed the ebb and flow of policy related to the talented child in the Peoples Republic of China. Until 1966 there had been a two-track system of education with the bright or gifted student being channeled to "key point schools" which received more resources and better staffing and were designed to be feeder schools for the universities in the Peoples Republic. The majority of students not destined for the universities went to schools that prepared them for vocational entry into the general work force.

A sudden and dramatic break from that tradition was established during the "Cutural Revolution." The two-track system was abandoned. Many schools and universities were closed. The examinations previously required for university admittance were changed and political acceptability, rather than academic performance, often became the basis for university attendance. However, with the death of Mao Tse Tung in 1976, the older system was largely reinstituted with the new policy of four modernizations which were the stated national priorities: agriculture, industry, national defense, science and technology as the central goals.

The key point schools were reestablished and competitive enrollment examinations for higher education once again became the source of selection, as well as a source of substantial anxiety for the prospective students and their parents. In these shifts, one can see the dynamic conflict between the desire to create more equal treatment of citizens and the needs of the society to move forward rapidly in its priority areas so they can be much more productive than in the past.

A similar dynamic balance could be found in the Soviet Union. Prior to the October Revolution, the Russian educational system provided education for the academically talented of the upper classes which allowed them access to the professions and to later leadership in the society. Even after the revolution, for a period of ten to fifteen years, there was a continued interest in the identification and special education of specially gifted and talented students (Berezina & Foteyeva, 1972).

In 1936, however, pedology, the science of individual child study, was denounced as anti-Marxist and a policy of heterogeneous grouping was adopted. Since that time there has been a continued debate in the Soviet Union over whether schools for academically talented students would encourage the wrong type of attitude in the students. Despite this concern, however, there continues to be a variety of special schools established and maintained in areas of

mathematics and science, as well as the establishment of many extracurriculur activities that allow gifted students to come together in special groups through programs such as the Pioneer Houses and Pioneer Camps. By means of these special programs, the regular school curriculum can be enriched with special instruction in fields such as technology, astronomy, history, ballet, etc., (Brickman, 1979).

Dunstan (1983) reported an analysis of Soviet press reports and scientific journals which revealed a continuing debate within the Soviet society about the appropriateness of providing special education for gifted students. On one hand, the proponents of the special schools and programs for the gifted point to the national interest, while those who are opposed to these schools, point to favoritism and a climate of elitism. Dunstan found that the majority of the comments in their press and journals was favorable to the continuation of such special schools and programs, but the opposition was strong enough to keep the development of such special schools to a relatively modest level.

In Western Europe the grouping of gifted students together was traditionally attained by separating students into different channels or tracks at the end of their primary grade education. The Eleven + Exams that provided the rationale for such division in Great Britain, and similar examinations, were largely abandoned as Western Europe became more sensitive after World War II to the

issue of equitable opportunity, treatment, and resource distribution (Vernon, 1977; Bridges, 1975; and Flack and Flack, 1979).

The influential Plowden Report reflected a trend toward greater concern over the egalitarian issues and supported a recommendation against separate schools for gifted students, except in the special areas of music and ballet. The report did support the development of enrichment programs for gifted students within the framework of the regular education system (Plowden, 1967), paralleling the American policy to try to meet both egalitarian and individual needs at the same time.

Stevens (1980) addressed one of the consequences of the establishment of comprehensive secondary schools, namely, the problem of maintaining high academic standards in the face of substantial heterogeneity of pupil population. Stevens expressed concern about the possible losses suffered by the gifted student, and the consequent price paid by Great Britain, in order that the educational opportunities for less talented be improved.

Another country that has enthusiastically embraced the concept of special programming and grouping gifted students for instructions is Israel. With a long societal commitment to the full development of intellectual capabilities and the obvious crises facing the Israeli nation, such provisions as grouping

gifted students have been executed with relatively little discussion or antagonism to the special classes and special school programs for gifted youth (Landau, 1979; Ritan, 1976; Butler-Por, 1983). Smilansky and Nevo (1975) described the evolution of programs for the disadvantaged in Israel over a thirty-year period. Another way of trying to combine the twin values of production and equity can be seen in the emphasis placed upon funding the encouragement of children with special talents in minority groups in the society. Mari (1981) has reported on a program to enhance highly creative Arab students in Israel.

One of the most extensive adaptations for gifted students in Israel is the boarding school fostering program (Shmueli, 1983). This program provided a residential setting for minority children to attend a secondary program to foster academic motivation and raise the level of aspiration of these gifted children. These programs stressed the value of scholastic attainment and provided both special-school and after-school experiences to engage the talents of these culturally different children. The results of the program seemed to justify the special efforts. After six years, the boarding program did succeed in creating a better educational opportunity for the gifted disadvantaged (Smilansky & Nevo, 1979). The increased opportunities provided for the children with limited environmental encouragement satisfied both the values of equity and production in this beleaguered Middle East society.

In Australia there appeared to have been an ebb and flow of interest in grouping students by ability at the secondary level (Lett, 1976). Larsson (1981) reported the same ambivalence in Australia as found in other countries which limited the educational grouping of gifted students. This policy was combined with special concerns for the identification and support for aboriginal children whose talents might be muted or disguised. Larsson believed that the current mood, however, leans toward a rejection of special help for gifted students based on feelings of:

> Egalitarianism which expressed itself in the feelings that children should not be segregated into elites because of gifts they had inherited. (p. 45)

In other countries in Western Europe there appears to be a substantial reluctance to provide special programming based upon the political and social philosophy, socialist politicians being the more reluctant supporters. Terrassier (1981) discussed the political philosophy in France that wishes to downplay the special needs of gifted students rather than be charged with elitism, and therefore has encouraged a policy of heterogeneous classes.

The most extreme example of a deliberate policy to limit the special educational programs for gifted and talented students may be seen in the Scandinavian nations. One of the most influential

spokesmen, Husen (1974), clearly expressed the point of view that there is a fundamental conflict between meritocracy and democracy. Husen was convinced that "redemptive equality" can only come about by playing down the reward status or authority that has often been associated with superior competence. These Scandinavian nations that have leaned to the liberal and socialist philosophy, and who at the same time are relatively economically favored, have decided that equitable distribution of resources and opportunities is more important than production and seem consequently to be not in favor of special programming for gifted students.

It must also be said that some of this negative reaction in the Western world to the special grouping of gifted children has been due to a number of injustices and unfairness that were connected with the earlier systems that literally closed the door to educational opportunity to a large segment of society including, no doubt, many youngsters whose outstanding gifts and talents were never given full opportunity for discovery or development (Passow, 1983).

The United States has gone through a similar ebb and flow of interest in this area with substantial attention paid to the special needs of gifted students during an era between 1958 and 1965 when production and national interest became a major societal concern. The threat of the Russian space technology stimulated a major, if brief, attention to math and science education, and this

interest extended over and influenced practically all of the content fields in the elementary and secondary schools (Gallagher, 1975; Passow, 1979).

In 1965 a major emphasis in the United States was placed on desegregation, essentially a concern for the equal distribution of educational resources and opportunity, and this preoccupation became the major educational agenda for the United States for the next decade. Beginning in the early 1970's there has been a growing interest in issues related to excellence in education and consequently the education of gifted students which seems to parallel a gradually growing concern about the role of the United States in the world and the need for greater production of ideas, technology, and performance.

Are we condemned on a world-wide basis to continue to vacillate from one pole to another, from production and national interests to a periodic burst of equity? The preceding discussion would seem to suggest that the societies described all struggle with this issue. There needs to be some degree of resolution of the competing forces of <u>production</u> and <u>equitable distribution</u> that seems to preoccupy modern societies. Krutetskii (1976), a Russian mathematician, has suggested one type of compromise. His interest was in the development of mathematical talent in Soviet youth, and he suggested that while it is clear that a good mathematics

education can provide substantially increased performance for all Soviet youth (equity), there are some youngsters specially endowed with a "mathematical cast of mind" that need and deserve special educational experiences and attention (production).

In the United States it seems possible to place stress upon a good educational program for all students and still have special provisions for gifted and talented students and further to have the benefits of each effort accrue to the gain of the other (Gallagher, in press). Perhaps the first step in such a changed philosophy (actually a synthesis of the two apparently opposed views) would be to understand the sociopolitical base for educational decision making regarding gifted students and to analyze those decisions to see if they best fit or meet the needs of that society in the last part of the Twentieth Century.

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RANKING OF ADMINISTRATIVE STRATEGIES BY

TEACHERS, ADMINISTRATORS, AND PARENTS (N=1200)

STRATEGIES	PERCENT CHOSEN FIRST (10 20 30 40 50)
1. Enrichment Classroom. Differentiated program of study by classroom teacher without outside personnel assistance.	
2. Consultant Teacher. Differentiated instruction in regular classroom with assistance from specially trained consultant.	
3. Resource Room - Pullout. Gifted students leave classroom for a limited time to receive instruction from a specially trained teacher.	
4. Community Mentor. Gifted students interact with community adults who have specialized knowledge on topic of special interest.	
5. Independent Study. Student select projects supervised by qualified teacher.	
6. Special Class. Gifted students grouped together majority of class time and instructed by specially trained teacher.	
7. Special Schools. Gifted students receive differentiated instruction in a special school with specially trained staff.